

Phoenix-Shaw Warehouse  
68-70 Front Street  
New York  
New York County  
New York

HABS No. NY-4394

HABS  
NY,  
31-NEYO,  
66-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. NY-4394

## PHOENIX-SHAW WAREHOUSE

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NY,  
31-NEYO,  
66-

Street Address: 68-70 Front Street, New York, New York County,  
New York.

Present Owner: Tove Associates, Inc., c/o Bernard R. Jankoff,  
521 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, New York.

Present Occupant: Unoccupied.

Present Use: Disused.

Brief Statement  
of Significance: This building is a relatively ambitious example  
of what was apparently the standard form in which  
to rebuild after a fire which in December 1835  
destroyed most of the area between Wall Street,  
Broad Street, Coenties Slip, and the East River.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: The property was acquired in 1827 and 1828 by a Jonas Phillips Phoenix; in 1951 it was sold by his heirs to Tove Associates. From the late 1870's until the building became disused (when exactly that was is not clear) it was "Robert Shaw's U.S. Bonded Warehouses, Inc."
2. Date of erection: The building was presumably erected between December 1835, the time of the fire, and October 31, 1836, when the property was leased to three tenants who used 70 Front Street as their address in 1837-1838.
3. Architect, builder etc.: No record of an architect or builder has been found, nor have plans.
4. Notes on alterations and additions: There are some recent partitions on the first floor; and at one time the front ends of the first two floors and the rear of the second were partitioned off and finished with boarding or plaster. The stairs between the first and second floors are presumably contemporary with one of these alterations.
5. Important old views and references: None have been found.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character: This warehouse, 4-1/2 stories high and four bays wide, is more ambitious than its neighbors built in the same period which are apt to be only three bays wide, with unrusticated piers, and with rafters supported directly by the party walls.
2. Condition of Fabric: There is considerable cracking between the street wall and party walls; the flooring is quite rotten.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Over-all dimensions: The building is 34 feet wide from party wall to party wall (inside measurement) by 79'4" deep (measured to exteriors of walls), and 4-1/2 stories high.
2. Foundations: The walls visible in the cellar are of roughly squared stones in a variety of sizes, except for the rear wall, which is largely of brick, and two stone piers (monoliths) as jambs at the cellar entrance from the street at the south corner of the building.
3. Wall construction: Brick wall construction, laid in common bond except for the front wall, where the bond is Flemish; the ground floor front wall is of rusticated granite.
4. Bulkheads, etc.: There is a bulkhead at the left front of the building covering stone steps which lead to the cellar; the bulkhead's sides are granite and the doors iron. A loading platform to the right of the bulkhead, running the rest of the length of the facade, is recent.
5. Chimneys: Two chimneys, of no particular interest, are visible toward the northwest ends of the party walls; two more are presumably at their southeast ends but are not visible from the street.
6. Openings
  - a. Doorways and doors: The first two ground floor openings from the north on both the front and rear of the building are doorways. The doors on the front are of iron and in four sections for each doorway; two sections, hinged together, are hung from each jamb.

Each section contains four panels edged with strips, of what may be zinc, in the form of enriched talon molding.

The rear doors, also iron but, unlike the front doors, set at the front of the jambs and opening outwards, are hung from hinges set in quoin-like blocks of brownstone built into the jambs; there being three of these in each jamb.

- b. Windows and shutters: On the first floor to the south of the front doorways are two window openings with shutters similar to the front doors. At the front of the basement, to the north of the cellar stairs, are three shuttered openings best described as windows. The remainder of the window openings in the building have stone lintels and sills, wooden frames set flush with the inside wall, with, on the first floor, 8/8 light sash and, elsewhere, 6/6 sash, and iron shutters hung in metal frames set at the front of the window reveals. On the two top floors some of the openings have been narrowed slightly with brick in order, apparently, to accept smaller, replacement window frames and sash. On the exterior, granite has been used for the sills and brownstone for the lintels; inside a finer grained, grey stone is used. There are brick relieving arches. The attic is lit by a small and possibly recent pair of openings high in the roof and by frieze windows at the front of the building. Cast iron wreath-openings, each of which can be closed with a pair of iron doors, are set into the frieze windows.

## 7. Roof

- a. Shape, covering: The roof is pitched down at an angle of approximately  $31^{\circ}$  from a central ridge parallel with the street. The rafters are supported at one end by wooden plates set into masonry at the top of the front and back walls and at two points along their lengths by purlins; each purlin is supported by three posts, one against each party wall and one halfway between; this structure is strengthened by beams which run from post to post and by struts which run from each post to the purlin it supports and, in the instances of the six higher posts, to the beams which connect them. The connections are made with wooden pegs; the posts rest on lengths of wood which distribute the weight of the roof on the attic floor. Above, a modern roofing covers what is apparently slate.

- b. Cornice: A denticulated cornice is formed on the front of the building by a copper gutter and corbelled brickwork; at the rear of the building only the gutter appears.

C. Technical Description of Interiors

1. Floor Plans: The interiors are undivided except by the recent partitions noted in Part I, A.4. and by a row of columns down the center of each floor. There is a hoist beside the row of columns, and slightly forward of the center of the building.
2. Stairways: Stairways are set against the southwest party wall opposite the hoist; these lead from the second floor to the attic. A newer stairway leads from the first to the second floor. A handrailing nailed to the stairs is quite crude and may be an addition; counter-weighted trapdoors at each floor and partial boarding-in of the stairs are presumably responses to 20th Century fire ordinances. A new iron staircase leads from the attic to a trapdoor in the roof.
3. Flooring: 11-3/4" x 4" joists set every foot are supported at one end by stepped-out courses of brick on the party walls and at the other end by foot-square (or in one case 13-1/2" deep by 10" or 11" wide) beams; the latter are supported on the first and second floors by wooden Doric columns, on the third and fourth by square wooden piers with wooden caps also square, and in the basement by wooden piers with square, cast-iron caps. The beams, except in the cellar, are chamfered between columns or piers.

In building the floor, a possible future need for more floor openings was taken into account; those contemplated were a second stairway opposite the one built, a second series of hoist openings on the opposite side of the beams from the present one, and a series of openings in the east corner of the building for no obvious purpose. Around both potential and actual openings the joists are heavier, about 5-3/4" thick; and, where these openings occur next to a party wall, the stepped-out courses of brick are eliminated.

The actual floor boards may vary in width between 7" and 10" within a small area.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Unfinished walls and ceilings.

5. Hoist: The wooden drum of the hoist is supported by a high, wooden-pegged trestle; the drive wheel is of metal-bound wood. The whole device has been considerably altered and, when last being used, was operated by electricity.
  6. Lighting: Electricity.
  7. Heating: There are two flues in each party wall; at the south end of the west party wall on the first floor and at both ends of the same party wall on the second floor there are fireplaces. On the opposite wall flues are indicated by gaps in the stepped-out courses of brick which support the joists.
- D. Site: The building is in a warehouse area, a block away from the harbour. It faces Southeast.

Prepared by Cervin Robinson, Photographer  
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